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THE EVOLUTION OF POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATION IN MICHIGAN

By Professor James K. Pollock
Professor of Political Science
University of Michigan

Introduction

I first became interested in this subject when I undertook a study of the chairmen of the national party committees, such men as Mark Hanna and Zach Chandler, and found that nothing had been done on the subject, not even a list of the chairmen having been made. Books had been written about who was elected President and how many votes the candidates had received, but studies have not been made of the managerial forces behind these elections. I also offered the first course in the study of political parties to be given at the University, although the convention system and political parties existed when Michigan was still a territory. Certain features of our party system are absolutely unique in the world; there is nothing, in the political world anywhere like our national party committees, or the direct primary. I have tried to interest graduate students in undertaking investigations of various aspects of the subject. The latest of these was Henry D. Brown, Assistant Curator of the Michigan Historical Collections until he left the University last February to join the Navy.*

Early Political History of Michigan

When Michigan entered the Union, the Democratic party was in the saddle, and the Whigs were very weak. When the Republican party, successor to the Whigs, was born in 1854, it rapidly pushed the Democrats into the background. Between 1854 and 1912, the Republican candidate for Governor was defeated only twice, in

*Henry D. Brown was Chairman of the Program Committee of the Washtenaw Historical Society in 1940-41, member of the Board of Directors 1941-42, and Vice-President 1942-43.

1882 and 1890. Franklin Roosevelt was the only Democratic President since 1852 to carry the state of Michigan.

Basis for Party Organization in the United States

The constitutional provisions for the choice of presidential electors and members of Congress have an important bearing on the way in which political party organization developed in the United States. Around these two provisions has been built up our entire system of political parties in the United States. The Federal government has no machinery for electing either the President or Congress; it cannot even say who may vote. This is all in the hands of the states, subject to a few restrictions.

For the first 50 years of our country, there were no federal regulations concerning elections. In 1842 Congress prescribed procedures for the election of representatives by districts. In 1866 the procedure for electing senators was laid down. And in 1871 the use of printed ballots was required.

All party machinery is tied into the national party organizations. Party machinery is controlled by national organizations in the interest of federal issues. The first national committee and national nominating convention dates back to 1832. However, local party organs are still older.

Development of Party Organization in Michigan

We have very little information prior to 1887, but it is known that both the legislature and the supreme court were reluctant to recognize the existence of political parties. In 1885, Justice Campbell made this pronouncement, "Parties, however powerful and unavoidable they may be, and however inseparable from popular government, are not and cannot be recognized as having any legal authority as such." (58 Mich. 213) And yet state party conventions and informal caucuses of political leaders were being held all over Michigan. Washtenaw County had a large share of these, and Ann Arbor itself was a popular meeting place.

Michigan

Two outstanding/leaders were Zach Chandler, chairman of the Republican national committee and earlier of the state central committee, and Don Dickinson, chairman of the Democratic national committee. All the important activities of these men seem to have been informal. If there existed any written or printed party rules or constitution before the nineties, I have not been able to find them. This informality was testified to in talks I have had with many old timers like Judge Weadock, who died some years ago at the ripe age of 96. He would relate, with an air of nostalgia, how these "gentlemen of the old school" would indulge in friendly, simple, easy-going discussions of "who do you suppose would be a good one, now, to run for governor?" Until the turn of the century, this was the method.

Then, for two decades, procedures became more exact, due in part to the introduction of the direct primary system of nomination. More money had come to be used in our elections, and nominations

were occasionally highly irregular. Scandals in Michigan did not grow as big as those in Wisconsin, with "Uncle" Isaac Stephenson, but they certainly approached them. Sordid and commercial influences intruded themselves, and by 1894 certain people of a reforming bent were making their dissatisfaction felt. In 1901 came the first local direct nomination law in Michigan; in 1905 the first general primary law was framed; and 1909 marks the real beginning of a general primary system in Michigan regulated by state law. The primary laws provided the machinery of party organization. The method of choosing party committees, their size and powers were also included in the general primary laws. In other words, with the new system of direct nomination of public officers, also came the statutory provisions for party organization.

I have just completed a ten-year research job on the evaluation of this direct primary system, from 1909 to 1935. It is the first such study in the United States. It has involved assembling the complete record of 15,000 candidates, what offices they ran for, the exact vote cast, proportionate party representation, etc. I feel that from this mass of data we may learn some facts about our electoral practices, and can support our opinions with exact evidence. This is still a practically virgin field for investigation, even within this century, not to speak of the preceding 75 years.

Every legislature tinkers a little with some provision or other of the primary law, but it is essentially the same as it was when started in 1909. Although women received the franchise in 1920, it took them five years to find out that they had no representation on party committees. When they insisted on such representation, they were granted one woman to two men from each state senatorial district. Again it took them four years to realize that the result of this requirement was not equal representation, so again they insisted on their rights and the requirement stands today 2 women and 2 men. Still representation is literally not equal, in my opinion, due to the fact that the women do not take advantage of this opportunity as they might.

Party Organization in Michigan Today

Not one person in a hundred knows how our county and state committees are chosen, and yet those two agencies are in control of the party, and thus in control of the officials who are nominated. At the primary, and even before, is the time to get excited and make one's complaining effective. Most people complain far too late.

In the fall of the even years we nominate our county officers. These candidates select the members of the county party committee. This is not done by the voters in Michigan, as it is in Ohio. The state central committee, the most important in the whole party organization, is chosen at the spring state convention in the odd years. Delegates to this convention are elected from county conventions whose delegates, in turn, were elected the preceding fall, in the primary.

The state convention is not a deliberative body; it is a mob. The deliberating is done in the hotel rooms of the leaders and in caucuses. These small rooms are packed full of men, many of whom don't know what it is all about, but among the few who do know some one voice will rise with a ring of authority and say, "Let's put in so-and-so,--" and the thing is done. Such methods as this go far back of the primary, back into the old informal days.

The contrast between today and yesterday is not so much a matter of size as it is of scope and activities of the party. The complexity of our modern life necessitates a complex governmental machinery. Back of 1900 there is not much to talk about, unless one could search files of old newspapers, for most of the records of things done are only to be found in the newspapers. There were no written rules, no legislation, and no supreme court decisions before 1885.

Discussion

Professor Pollock responded to questions from the audience with the following remarks:

Before 1871, when printed ballots were first required, voting was not secret. I have an extensive collection of ballots used in the United States, among them many curiosa. There is a "vest-pocket ballot," used in Lincoln's time, a long narrow strip of paper with names printed on it. This ballot was given out before election day, and was supposed to be folded over and over until it would fit in the vest pocket, taken to the polls and dropped in, no marking done on it at all.

I think we are bothered with far too many names on our ballots. Many minor officials should never be elected; they should be appointed. The ordinary citizen does not know anything about these individuals, and either does not vote for the office at all, or says to himself, "This man has held this office for so many years, I guess he must be all right; I'll vote for him."

The county government in Michigan is virtually the same as it was when Michigan became a state, as if in 110 years conditions had remained unchanged.

Why has Michigan produced so few national political figures? A half-dozen, yes,-- Lewis Cass, Zach Chandler, Don Dickinson, Russell Alger, Edwin Denby, President Angell, Frank Murphy,-- and that's all. (Audience suggests Hazen Pingree and Chase S. Osborn.) Possibly, but their influence was more state than national, Partly this is due to the one-sidedness of our Michigan politics. (Suggestion from audience that this state is still new and raw, lacking the background of the New England states.) True, but in 1850 two-thirds of the residents of Michigan were born in New York. These were however not families of statesmen who moved out west, they were pioneers, not a group selected to produce national political figures.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF EARLY WASHTENAW COUNTY CHURCHES

By Harvey C. Colburn, Ypsilanti
Formerly Minister of the First Congregational Church of Ypsilanti

The story of local church organizations, as commonly written, have to do, in the main, with external events, such as the coming of a missionary, the circumstances of origin, the erection of a new building, the purchase of an organ or a bell. Such history is certainly of value and should be recorded by persons interested in particular congregations. However, a more thorough history must penetrate a more difficult field. It must deal with the effect of the realities of religion upon the social life of the community and upon the personalities of those who come under particular religious influences. The writing of such history is a matter of great hazard. It calls for deep understanding and honest sympathy.

Through such a history certain lines will run continuously. These lines will represent what may be called the Christian experience. There is a certain type of spiritual or psychological experience which is characteristic of the Christian faith in all times and all places and among all people. The several points of this Christian experience are often obscured and variously emphasized, but in practice they are not denied by any Christian organization. They constitute the real orthodoxy.

This paper offers a few notes on the development of religious expression and organization in the Washtenaw County of pioneer days, without attempting to follow the story into later periods. The religious backgrounds of the Washtenaw County pioneers were determined largely by the sections from which they came. Denominational groups were: Congregational and Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and the German churches. The latter, as it deserves extended treatment beyond the time limits tonight, is not treated in this paper. Other denominational groups do enter into the picture, but mostly later than the period of early settlement.

The Congregational and Presbyterian churches not only constitute one group, but appear in the records of early days in Michigan under one name,- Presbyterian. This was largely due to a "Plan of Union," providing for cooperation on Western missionary fields, which was formulated in 1801. In the background of the Congregational Church is the Puritanism of England. Many churches have a similar origin in the appearance of some great and new religious enthusiasm, which cracks the shell of religious organization.

Many Puritans remained within the Church of England. Others became members of separatist organizations, such as the Congregationalists, the Baptists, and the Quakers. A democratic theory of the Church resulted from such withdrawals, and a practical training in the theory and practice of democracy within the church itself.

In the early years, Ypsilanti and other settlements of the County found a religious ministry in certain more or less itinerant missionaries of the church, recognized by parent bodies of Presbyterians and Congregationalists in New York and New England. Among them were William Page, also associated with the Ann Arbor ministry, and N. M. Wells, from Detroit. In Ypsilanti was gathered together a little group of Presbyterians and Congregationalists who in the absence of the missionary met for prayer and the reading of the scripture. In 1829, Page organized this group into the First Presbyterian Church and the Congregational Society of Ypsilanti. The church first held its meetings in a store building, then in a school house. In the fall of 1829 came Rev. William Jones as pastor of the church, the town being included in a circuit with Carpenter's Corners, Dixboro, and Stony Creek.

Jones was a fair representative of the New England conscience. That Puritan conscience is commonly conceived as a nosey thing, intruding itself into affairs which are the concern of only those directly involved. The description is scarcely fair. Perhaps it were better to conceive it as a social conscience. The New England Puritans had come to this country largely to escape unfavorable social conditions of the old world and to emerge into the sort of freedom which they desired. Their home in the new world was not only their house, but the community into which their lives and those of their children were to be set. People of low moral influence were seen as a menace to the purity and integrity of the whole body. The morals of the individual thus became a matter of public concern.

It was just that situation which was faced by the people of Ypsilanti. The flotsam of the more settled eastern communities was washed up onto the beach of the new frontier. Sharp distinctions must be drawn in the character groups of the early settlers. In Ypsilanti at least there was much reason to do so. The story of the "Kings of the River," incidents of drunkenness, thievery, and violence are a part of the narrative. Too many immigrants passed through the town without caring to stop. The ultimate solution of a public committee working in conjunction with the officers of the law had not yet been found.

Brother Jones was a man greatly needed. His New England conscience became operative at once. His first reaction was to describe Ypsilanti as a community without a church and in a deplorable condition, the people much given over to indulgence in intoxicating drinks and openly desecrating the Sabbath by revelry and drunkenness. It was quite in keeping with the sense of the time if he included in Sabbath desecration the pitching of quoits on the bank of the river.

The organizing of temperance societies was a natural and proper reaction of Christian people. The policy of these societies did not proscribe the use of the lighter alcoholic drinks, such as wine, beer, and cider, but hard liquor could be bought

cheaply in the jug, and too large a part of the community drank too much whiskey and was drunk too much of the time. The consequences were not merely individual; they were social. Jones was a fore-runner, and his ardent labors in the field of social morality were continued with fervency by the later groups, not only of Presbyterians and Congregationalists but of Methodists and Baptists as well.

The first organization, composed of both Presbyterians and Congregationalists, decided by vote to become a Presbyterian church, but it is noteworthy that the financial affairs of the church, including title to the property, were left in the hands of the Congregational Society. This was an old New England institution designed to give a voice to all the financial supporters of the church. It recognized the church building as a community project, and included contributors in the town who were not members of the church.

Succeeding Jones, there came from the East a new pastor, Ira M. Weed, who continued his service for many years and set largely his influence upon the life of the community. The raw town of Ypsilanti provided opportunity for exhibition of his courage and fidelity. His salary was in part provided by the Home Missionary Society and partly by such local contributions as a bag of potatoes or ten pounds of pork. In addition, the congregation was supposed to raise $400 in cash annually.

Of significance also is the coming to Michigan of John D. Pierce. A large oil portrait of this pioneer hangs in the Administration Building of the Michigan State Normal College. He is known as "Father Pierce," father of the educational system of Michigan. He came as a young home missionary of the Congregational Church, raised in Vermont and educated in the East. In selecting the field of his life work, he chose to come to Michigan, because of the destitution as well as the opportunities of the field.

The Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti, after worshipping in private homes and in the Old Red School House, erected a church building of its own in 1835. This church was on the pattern of the New England meeting house and fronted on the Public Square, which has long since disappeared. The second and present building dates from 1857, but additions and alterations have greatly changed its appearance.

The arrangement between Congregationalists and Presbyterians in Ypsilanti was continued until 1881. At that time those who preferred the Congregational form of organization withdrew and formed the present Congregational Church. The withdrawal was conducted entirely in a spirit of amity, and was occasioned largely by increase in the congregation.

The Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor was organized in 1826, its antecedents and origin being similar to those of the Ypsilanti church. A small group of people brought their letters of dismis-

sion from churches "back east." They met for worship in a log school building, then the ball room of the tavern, and in 1829 erected the first church of the village, 25 by 35 feet. Increasing attendance necessitated a 20-foot addition, and in 1837 a larger frame building.

The constituency of the Ann Arbor church was of mixed Presbyterian and Congregational origin. This arrangement continued amicably until the period of 1846-47. After some dissension, the Congregational members, 48 in number, withdrew to form the still existing Congregational Church. The causes of dissension appear to have been three: the anti-slavery agitation of the period; desire on the part of some to have church government entirely in the hands of the local membership; and a conservative reaction against emotionalism and revivalism. The new congregation moved into the Court House and eventually erected its own meeting house, with a fine new bell. The present edifice was completed and dedicated in 1876, the cost being $35,000.

Baptist ministers visited Ypsilanti in the early thirties and in 1836 a church was organized with 16 members, meetings being held in a school house and later in the abandoned Methodist Church on the East Side. In 1847 a church building was erected. The minister in that year was Elder L. H. Moore, who made no small contribution to the education of the community by opening the Ypsilanti Seminary in a brick hotel building, never used as such and known as one of Ypsilanti's Follies.

The Ann Arbor Baptist Church is of earlier date, organized in 1828. In 1835 a church building seating 100 persons was erected, and in 1841 the building was doubled in capacity. The church had a hard financial struggle during its early days, but with the enlargement of the community was able to erect, in 1849, a brick church costing $4,000. The present edifice dates from 1881.

The Ypsilanti community was visited by a Methodist minister while it was still Woodruff's Grove, and later a small group of Methodists was served by a succession of missionaries. A Sunday School was organized in 1828 in a log building, with 18 children and 5 adults in attendance. In 1831 a small brick church building was erected. In 1837 the church was designated by the Methodist Conference as a "station," and by the following year 190 members were enrolled. The location was eventually moved to Washington Street and a white frame building erected, to be followed later by the present edifice.

Rev. John A. Baughman was the first Methodist Circuit Rider to arrive at Ann Arbor. In 1826, under his leadership, the town became a station on the Monroe Methodist circuit. In 1830 Ann Arbor was made a regular appointment. A church was erected in 1836, and succeeding that there were many accessions to the membership.

The fact that the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists and Baptists of the early days had a common heritage is well expressed by O. W. Stephenson in his "Ann Arbor, the First Hundred Years":

> Many of them had a two-century background of Calvinistic discipline; their consciences were tender as far as they saw the light, and they distinguished clearly between right and wrong. They were inclined to be serious in their thinking, subjecting themselves to inward scrutiny and sometimes given to morbid introspection. They reflected gravely on the problem of personal salvation...and, at other times,...over the conduct of their neighbors. They brought to Ann Arbor a spirit of political and religious independence, and a body of political and religious ideals, which, in large measure, may be traced to their old Puritan training.

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